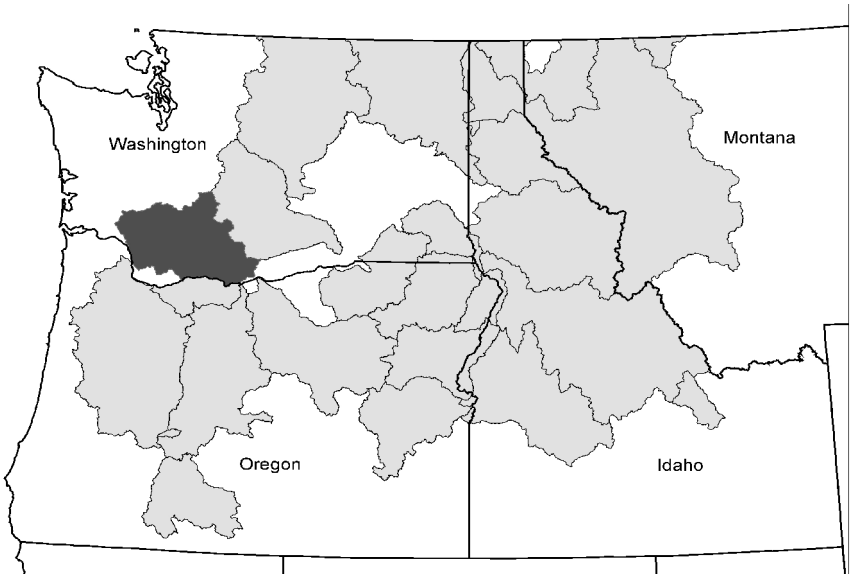
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bull Trout Draft Recovery Plan

and proposed Critical Habitat

Lower Columbia River Recovery Unit

(CHAPTER 20)



What areas are included in the Lower Columbia River Recovery Unit?

This unit includes the Lewis River and Klickitat River core areas in Washington. The Lewis River Core Area consists of the mainstem Lewis River and tributaries downstream to the confluence with the Columbia River, with the exclusion of the East Fork of the Lewis River. The Klickitat River Core Area includes the Klickitat River and all tributaries downstream to the confluence with the Columbia River.

How much of the area is proposed as critical habitat?

Approximately 171 miles of streams and 12,078 acres of reservoirs are proposed for critical habitat. This totals approximately 2 percent of the total waterways in the recovery unit.

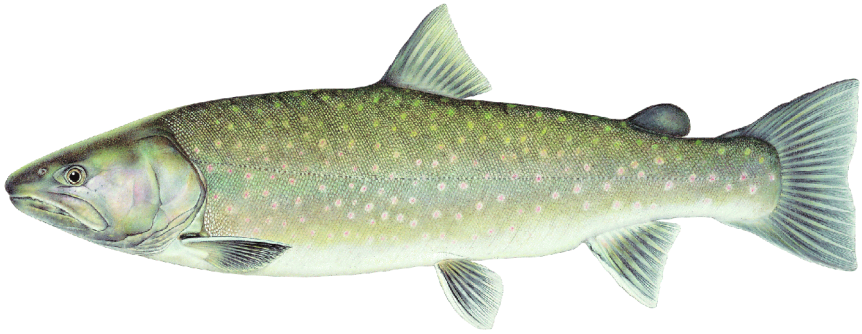
Who developed the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan and critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan for bull trout was developed through the collaboration of Federal, State, Tribal and private biologists working with representatives of local watersheds, private landowners and industry and conservation organizations. A total of 24 local recovery unit teams contributed to the development of the draft recovery plans for each of the recovery units. These recovery unit teams included experts in biology, hydrology and forestry, as well as natural resource users and stakeholders with interest and knowledge of bull trout and the habitats they depend on for survival. The critical habitat proposal was based in large part on information developed by the recovery unit teams and supplemented with even more recent information on the current distribution and habitat characteristics of the species.

What is the relationship between the draft Bull Trout Recovery Plan and the critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal are closely linked. The information developed by the recovery unit teams, and the science underlying that information, are the basis for the critical habitat proposals. However, critical habitat is designed to provide for the conservation of a species by identifying those areas essential for conservation and requiring special management, whereas a

recovery plan is a much larger blueprint providing guidance for the eventual recovery and de-listing of a species.



Who would be affected by recovery efforts and a critical habitat designation?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority. It is the Fish and Wildlife Service's estimation of the actions necessary for the recovery of the species. Agencies, communities or individuals would be affected only if they are taking voluntary actions to benefit bull trout.

The primary effect of a critical habitat designation is that Federal agencies are required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that might affect critical habitat.

It is important to note that in most cases, this is already occurring under the section 7 interagency consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Non-Federal entities, including private landowners, that may also be affected could include, for example, those seeking a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit under the Clean Water Act to build an in-water structure, those seeking Federal approval to discharge effluent into the aquatic environment, or those seeking Federal funding to implement private property improvements, where such actions affect the aquatic environment that has been designated as critical habitat. But again, in most cases where this link between activities on private lands and Federal funding, permitting, or authorization exists, consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is already occurring.

A critical habitat designation does not have any effect on non-Federal entities when there is not a Federal nexus. For example, swimming, boating, fishing, farming, ranching, or any of a range of activities normally conducted by a landowner or operator of a business not involving Federal funding, permitting, or authorization in order to occur would not be affected.

How was the draft recovery plan for each unit developed?

Recovery units were delineated based on the biology of the species and considerations for paralleling existing state conservation and fisheries management frameworks wherever possible. Recovery teams incorporated existing state conservation processes to the degree possible, depending on the degree to which they had been developed (for example, the Montana Bull Trout Restoration Plan, the State of Idaho's Bull Trout Conservation Plan, the State of Washington's Statewide Strategy to Recover Salmon and the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds).

What is the status of bull trout in the Lower Columbia Recovery Unit?

Bull trout in this unit are included in the Columbia River Basin distinct population segment of bull trout, which were listed in 1998 as a threatened species. In the two core areas, local populations of bull trout exist in the Cougar, Pine and Rush creeks (tributaries of the Lewis River) and the west fork of the Klickitat River. No local populations have been identified in the White Salmon River, but that area contains core habitat and after migratory obstructions are addressed, could support bull trout that migrate from the Columbia River. Additional research is needed to determine if the Cowlitz and Kalama rivers are important for bull trout recovery.

What are the threats to bull trout in the Lower Columbia Recovery Unit?

Bull trout in this area are threatened by habitat fragmentation and degradation, blockage of migratory corridors, poor water quality, past fisheries management practices, improper grazing practices and the introduction of non-native species. A more detailed discussion of threats can be found in the Lower Columbia River Unit recovery plan chapter.

What are the recovery goals and objectives?

The goal of the bull trout recovery plan is to ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining, complex interacting groups of bull trout distributed across the species' range so that the species can be de-listed. To recover bull trout in the Lower Columbia Recovery Unit, the following objectives have been identified:

- Maintain current distribution of bull trout and restore distribution in previously occupied areas within this unit
- Maintain stable or increasing trends in abundance of bull trout
- Restore and maintain suitable habitat conditions for all bull trout life stages

- Conserve genetic diversity and provide opportunity for genetic exchange

What are the criteria for measuring recovery?

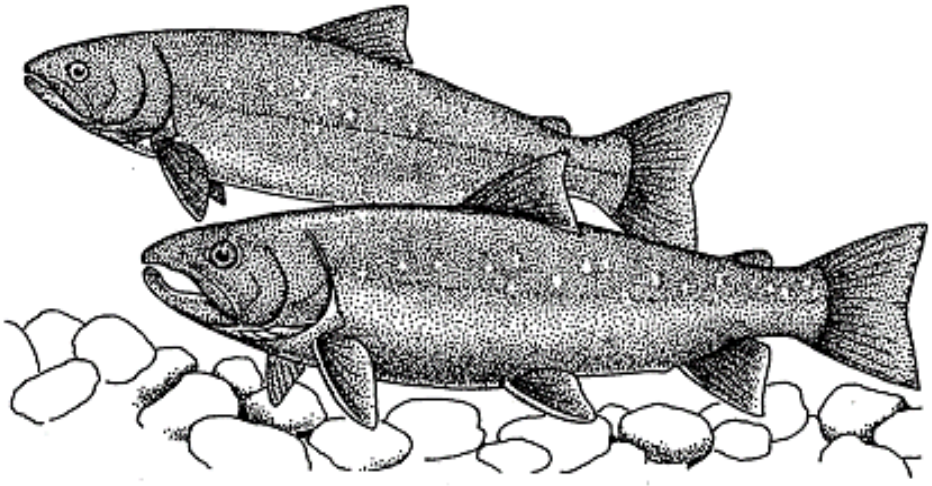
Recovery will be measured according to four criteria: distribution, abundance, population trends and connectivity in the watershed. The recovery plan includes specific, quantifiable standards for each of these criteria.

- **Distribution criteria** is unknown at this time and requires more research. Until additional information is obtained, the Lower Columbia Recovery Unit team believes a minimum of four populations throughout the unit need to be maintained.

- **Abundance criteria** also is unknown at this time and requires more research. As more data is collected biologists can estimate how large recovered populations in this area should be.

- **Trend criteria** will be met when adult bull trout within the two core areas exhibit a stable or increasing trend in numbers for at least two generations at or above recovered abundance levels.

- **Connectivity criteria** will be met when specific barriers inhibiting bull trout movement and recovery in the Lower Columbia Recovery Unit have been addressed, ensuring opportunities for connectivity among local populations within the core area. Fish passage needs to be addressed at Swift and Yale dams on the Lewis River and Condit Dam on the White Salmon River.



What actions will be necessary to recover bull trout in the Lower Columbia River Recovery Unit?

Recovery for bull trout will entail reducing threats to the long-term persistence of populations and their habitats, ensuring the security of multiple interacting groups of bull trout, and providing habitat and access to conditions that allow for the expression of various life history forms. Some of the

actions required include: Working with State and Tribal interests in developing a bull trout fisheries management plan; assessing water quality issues; preventing incidental angling mortality and poaching; and assessing the impacts of non-native species.

How long will recovery take?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority; therefore it is difficult to determine how long it will take to recover bull trout in the Lower Columbia Recovery Unit. However, given our best estimate of what government agencies and others might do, it could take three to five bull trout generations (15 to 25 years) or longer before identified threats to the species can be significantly reduced and bull trout can be considered eligible for delisting.

How much will recovery cost?

Estimating the cost of recovery is difficult and complex, due to many variables and unknowns. However, the Lower Columbia Recovery Unit team has estimated that recovery could cost about $8 million spread over 15 to 25 years. This figure does not include any capital improvements associated with recommended fish passage measures at Swift, Yale and Condit dams. This figure includes estimates of expenditures by local, Tribal, State and Federal governments and by private business and individuals. The estimates are attributed to bull trout conservation but other aquatic species also will benefit. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is soliciting comments from the public on the estimated costs.

How can I obtain copies of the documents?

The documents, along with maps, fact sheets, photographs and other materials may be found on the Pacific Region's website at http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout.

How can I comment?

The Service will be accepting comments, beginning November 29, 2002, on its draft recovery plan for bull trout in the Columbia and Klamath river basins and in the St. Mary-Belly River Basin in Montana. Comments on the draft recovery plan will be accepted for 90 days, until February 27, 2003. Comments on the draft recovery plan may be mailed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, ID 83709; faxed to 208-378-5262, or sent via e-mail to: fw1srbocomment@fws.gov

Beginning November 29, 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will accept comments from the public on the agency's proposal to designate critical habitat for the Columbia River and Klamath River distinct population segments of bull trout. Comments will be accepted for 60 days, until January 28, 2003. Comments on the critical habitat proposal may be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Regional Office, attn: John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland Oregon 97232; faxed to 503.231.6243 or e-mailed to: R1bulltroutCH@r1.fws.gov

In addition, a series of public meetings and public hearings will be held in January. Times and locations will be posted on our Bull Trout website at http://species.fws.gov/bulltrout and publicized in local newspapers.

This is only a brief summary.

Please see full draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal for complete details.